

# The Force Can't Save You from Safety Prosecutions



The safety laws across the world apply to various kinds of workplaces, including movie sets. Although safety may not be as much of a concern on many film sets as it is, say, in a mine or on a construction site, safety hazards may still be present and endanger workers. And the companies responsible for the movie sets may be prosecuted when safety incidents occur.

For example, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Great Britain's OHS regulator, recently announced that Foodles Production (UK) Ltd. will be prosecuted for four safety violations over an incident in which actor Harrison Ford was seriously injured during the filming of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Ford suffered a broken leg and other injuries when he was struck by a heavy hydraulic metal door on the set of the Millennium Falcon.

Foodles is the company responsible for producing the movie and so, under British health and safety law, is also responsible for managing the risks created during production. The charges include failing to take effective measures to prevent access to any dangerous part of machinery or rotating stock-bar, or to stop the movement of any dangerous part of machinery or rotating stock-bar before any part of a person enters a danger zone.

UPDATE: On July 26, 2016, Foodles pleaded guilty to two safety offenses. It will be sentenced in August.

Other examples of safety incidents in the entertainment industry:

- Sarah Jones, a 27-year-old camera assistant, died on the set of an independent film in rural Georgia. The film's director pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter and criminal trespass and was sentenced to two years' jail, eight years on probation and a \$20,000 fine. An executive producer also pleaded guilty and was fined and sentenced to 10 years' probation. And an assistant director was convicted her of involuntary manslaughter and criminal trespass and sentenced to 10 years' probation.
- In Québec, a Russian acrobat was training on a swing when he lost his balance and fell, hitting his head on the ground. He died from his injuries. The CSST found that the Cirque du Soleil didn't adequately evaluate the risks of using the swing and fined it \$1,915.

- On a movie set near Vancouver, six people were injured in a propane explosion. They suffered minor burns and, in one case, a broken leg. The explosion apparently happened while crews transferred propane from a tanker into portable containers. A hose came off the propane tank and a nearby heater sparked a flash fire.
- In Alberta, a film crew was shooting a video when two workers got trapped on a platform three storeys above the ground. One of the workers received an electric shock, resulting in electrical burns to his foot. After the power was turned off, the fire crew rescued the two workers.

To improve workplace safety in the entertainment industry, OHS regulators and safety associations in Canada have offered specialized guidance for this industry.

For example, WorkSafeBC's website has a page dedicated to safety in the performing arts and film industry. In Nova Scotia, the Film Industry Health and Safety Committee released guidelines that explain OHS legislation in user-friendly language.

And after the death of a Cirque du Soleil performer in Las Vegas when her safety wire snapped, Ontario's MOL released revised safety guidelines for the live performance industry that cover:

- Stage Combat/Stunts and Weaponry
- Temporary Performance/Event Structures
- Risk Assessment for Productions
- Mechanised Scenery and Automated Systems
- Scenery.